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# JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE LOGOS

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There was perhaps no passage of Scripture which caused the translators of the Bible into Japanese so much trouble as the opening verses of the Gospel according to John. The controversy was not over the meaning of the *Logos*, but rather over the oriental equivalent and the word to be chosen as the best translation. The committee of translators divided into two camps: on the one side were those familiar with the Chinese version which they seemed to regard as even more authoritative than the Greek, Latin, and other versions before them. On the other side was the thoroughgoing Japanese party which did not regard the Chinese version as a necessary medium for transmitting western thought. In the Chinese version the *Logos* had been translated by the word *T'ao*, Japanese *Do* or *Michi*, meaning "way," i.e., "way" both in a literal sense and "way" also in the sense of the law of things, the divine principle of things. But the Japanese party felt that this content was inadequate, and rather than take a word with such a definite content it would be better to translate *logos* by the Japanese term for "word," *kotoba*, and then let usage and exegesis by-and-by fill this Japanese term for "word," *kotoba*, with the full Christian *logos*-content. The result of the controversy was a compromise, and it was a compromise rather striking. The Chinese character for *do*, *michi*, i.e.,

"way," was retained, but the pronunciation of it, as indicated by the *kana*-system of writing which is written alongside of the Chinese characters, was fixed as *kotoba*, "word." So when a Japanese reads his Bible his eye takes in the double idea of "way" and "word," though the ear would only catch the term for "word."

Now, of course, after several decades of Christian preaching and exegesis the *logos*-passage is understood fairly much in the same way as it would be in the West, though of course to the scholar in the East who is acquainted with his own systems of thought and somewhat under their sway the *logos*-doctrine is more or less modified, for the East too has the *logos*-idea, all apart from its recent introduction by Christianity. And it is of these oriental counterparts that we wish to speak, after first giving a brief statement of the main outlines of the *logos*-idea in the West.

## I. The *Logos*-Idea in the West

We realize of course that there is no such thing as a definite *logos*-doctrine, or rather that it was held under various forms. Only in a general way may we say that it stood for the idea of an immanent reason in things. It is the theory that there is a rational principle in the universe. For convenience' sake we will divide the résumé into five divisions.

### 1. The Greek Logos

From the beginning of Greek philosophy with its idea of a cosmos, the *logos*-doctrine is more or less present. Heraclitus in the sixth century, it would seem, was the first to recognize the inadequacy of the older theories of the universe which conceived of all things in terms of the purely physical. He felt the need of inserting the idea that there is something in reality like the reasoning power in man. In short, he felt that reality should be interpreted in terms of the psychic. But his conception of the psychic was after all rather materialistic, and so his rational principle of the universe, his *logos*, was only a refined sort of substance, a supersensible form of matter.

This conception of a refined psychico-physical substance gave rise through Anaxagoras and his followers to the conception of a supreme, intellectual principle, not identified with the physical world, but independent of it. This was the first clear formulation of the dualism of mind and matter. Plato's ideas as "archetypes" of things and as the deepest realities were one step farther in recognizing the rational principle of things. In fact, with Plato the idea and the rational principle tended to exclude the other side of reality represented by the concept matter, though his system was never an absolute monistic idealism, but always recognized, at least in a measure, the *μηδόν*.

Plato's ideas were mere archetypes and they lacked the active principle that is everywhere manifested in things. This was supplied by the Stoics. Their *logos* was not only a rational principle in things, but an active force,

and because of the emphasis on the idea of activity, Stoicism in its *logos*-doctrine reverted again, to a degree at least, to the old Heraclitean position which recognized Reason in things, but which conceived of Reason again in terms of substance. They spoke of "God and the *Logos*," but the conception was Pantheistic or rather Hylozoistic with a tendency toward a refined materialistic monism. Thus the *logos*, the immanent Reason of things, is the ultimate existence, but it is an existence conceived more in terms of substance than in terms of man's psychic life. With the Stoics began the special idea of the *seminal logos*, i.e., the idea that the *Logos* is divided into the *logoi* and that thus man as an individual, rational being is but a part, as it were, of the One Great Reason. Truth in the thought of an individual is the expression of the *Logos*.

### 2. The Hebrew Logos

The Israelites, particularly in the early period, had an overpowering sense of the reality of a personal God who is the creator and sustainer of all things. This strong belief often expressed itself in extreme and almost crude anthropomorphic conception, but when the Jews became a little more speculative they began to think of God rather as the Absolute and the Infinite. God ceased to be so near and Yahweh was replaced by the Almighty, the Majesty on High. Thus there arose a feeling for the need of a mediator between this Majesty on High and man. This mediatorship was assigned to the Shekinah, the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the Wisdom of God. The creative Word in Genesis and the Wisdom of God in the Wisdom

literature exercised very much the same function as that of the *Logos* in other systems. The Word of God and the Wisdom of God were not regarded as absolutely separate from God, but rather as attributes of God, though occasionally there was a tendency toward separation of the Word and even of personifying it. But whether regarded as a part of God or as separate from God the *logos* in Hebrew thought was always subordinate to God, and never is God, as the absolute, dissolved into a mere rational principle of the universe.

### 3. The Persian Logos

Persian dualism recognized two principles in things, viz., light and darkness, good and evil, mind and matter. Each principle is underived, and from the interaction of the two this world has arisen. Individuals are, as it were, parts of the great realities and they represent in varying degrees the nature of these ultimate principles. The rational in man is a part of the rational principle in the all, i.e., the *Logos* as in Stoicism is divided into the *logoi*, though in Persian thought the emphasis was not placed so much on the idea of the rational as on the idea of the good. That is, the *logos*-principle had a strong ethical bent.

### 4. Greco-Jewish Logos of Philo

Philo's *logos* is a combination of Jewish and Greek conceptions. He starts with the Jewish conception of God as the ultimate reality and the *logos* is subordinate to this self-existing God and therefore not an absolute principle as it was in Stoic philosophy. The immanent reason in the world is subordinate to the creator of the world. But under the influence of the "creative word"

idea of Jewish thought and the Stoic idea of the dynamic *logos* Philo makes his *logos* more than a mere rational principle of things or a mere "archetypal idea" of Platonism, but rather a combination of the rational and active principle in things. This combination is elevated into a real being other than God and other than the world, a sort of intermediary being or a second God. Probably under the influence of Persian dualism of good and evil Philo felt the need of an intermediary being between the perfect God and this world of evil; and this helped emphasize his conception of the *logos* as a separate being that could bridge the chasm. But even this was not sufficient, for if the *logos* is a being who sums up in himself the activities and attributes of God he cannot be responsible for the evil in the world. This led Philo, in spite of his Hebraic starting-point of God, to adopt a sort of dualism after all. God through the *logos* does not create the world, but fashions the world out of chaos according to the principles of reason; the matter or substance of chaos being given. In short, Philo too had to make room in his system for a principle other than the *logos*-principle. Opposed to mind is matter, opposed to good is evil, opposed to the rational (*logos*) is the irrational.

### 5. The Christian Logos

The framework of the Christian *logos*-doctrine, as found in the Fourth Gospel and in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, is essentially that of Philo, who regarded the *logos* as a person, but the content is after all somewhat different. Philo's *logos* is the *logos* of metaphysical speculation, the Christian *logos*

starts with a given fact and experience, viz., the fact of the person of Jesus Christ, and tries to fit this fact into a metaphysical schema. The Christian *logos*, in short, is the creative word of the Old Testament become flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Then further, in the New Testament the *logos* is not so much the rational and creative agency of the divine as the redemptive agency. Not the creative word in the sense that the word creates the world, but rather the revealed word, the word that creates a new life out of existing life.

#### **Summary of the Logos-Doctrine**

Now from this cursory review of the different forms of the *logos*-doctrine let us try to get a general conception, and sum up if possible under a few main heads what seem to be the main ideas.

In general, as we said above, the *logos*-doctrine stands for the theory that there is a rational principle in things. And this rational principle of things is regarded in the above theories in one of three ways:

1. It is regarded as the ultimate and absolute principle, superior to all other principles.

2. It is regarded as one of two principles, i.e., co-ordinate with another and opposing principle.

3. It is regarded as a subordinate principle, subject to a higher and more ultimate reality.

The first of these is represented by certain phases of the Greek *logos*, principally the Stoic. The second has its best representative in Persian Dualism, though early Greek philosophy, too, manifests such a tendency, and Philo himself is not altogether free from it. The third finds its chief representative

in the Hebraic thought in which the *logos*-principle was always subordinated in one way or another to the ultimate reality, God.

## **II. The Oriental Counterparts**

As we said above, the term by which *logos* in the Fourth Gospel is translated is the Chinese *T'ao*.

#### **1. *T'ao* (Japanese *Do* or *Michi*—Way)**

Now the word *T'ao* is the same as the *T'ao* in *T'aoism*, the ancient religion of China. *T'aoism* on its philosophical side is essentially a *logos*-philosophy. The ultimate is *T'ao* and *T'ao* is the *way* of Nature. If *T'aoism* were being formulated today, the idea would be very little different from our conception of the rational laws of Nature. *T'aoism* did not personify the *T'ao*, but rather represented it as the great rational principle that pervades the universe. Man is a part of the *T'ao* as the *logoi* were a part of the *Logos* in Stoic philosophy. Man's supreme business is to let the *T'ao* that is within him have supreme sway. If man becomes thoroughly assimilated to *T'ao* he will have peace and quiet and attain his highest destiny. *T'ao* is the norm and substance of all things, and the imperfections and annoyances of life are but a secondary reality which can be entirely eradicated if man would but let the supreme *T'ao* have its way, i.e., let the supreme *Way* be his way. Jesus as the *Way* of life would thus be the easiest way of approach to those trained in *T'aoistic* thought. The only difficulty is that *T'ao* is not personal, but, as we said above, more like the *logos* of the Stoic philosophers.

Similar to the Chinese *T'ao* is that other great conception that runs all

through Chinese and Japanese philosophy, viz., the conception of the *Ri*—“reason” or “rational principle.” The *Ri*, however, seldom stands alone, for the Chinese were too practical and had too much the sense of the real world that surrounded them ever to ignore that other aspect of existence which has always made even the most severe monistic systems leave one window open for dualism or pluralism. In some cases, however, an attempt is made to reduce the *Ri* and its opposing principle to a more ultimate reality, and the result is a system very much akin to Spinoza’s. In other systems the two opposing principles of existence are conceived of in terms of moral qualities, e.g., the *Yang* and *Yin*—Light and Darkness, Good and Evil—a conception practically the same as that of Persian Dualism.

### **2. The *Ri***

In some of the later Buddhist systems of thought a supreme effort is made to make the *Ri*, the rational principle of things, into the ultimate and to reduce the opposing principle to a secondary and accidental reality. In fact, all imperfection and irrationality is said to have no real existence. It is due to ignorance and illusion. But what is the origin of ignorance and illusion? It has no origin, because the idea that there is ignorance and illusion is itself an illusion, i.e., not real. But the point in all these systems is this, viz., that there is a rational principle in things and that the *Ri* either is the ultimate principle itself or at least is one aspect of the ultimate reality.

### **3. Personifications**

In the West the *logos*-principle was sometimes personified. In Philo, e.g.,

the *logos* was regarded as an individual being, and in Christianity it became the incarnate Son of God. In the East there have been similar tendencies. The idea of personality is, of course, very vague in the Orient, and especially is the oriental mind slow in thinking of the ultimate reality in terms of personality. Pantheism has ever been and is today still the dominant mood; but in spite of this fact there have been tendencies in eastern thought which make room for the concept of personality, even when applied to ultimate principles and realities. Polytheism, so common in the East, is itself one of these tendencies, for what is polytheism but a personification of existence? It is true, polytheism is not a personification of the *logos*-principle but rather a personifying of all attributes and characteristics of existence. But polytheism in the mind of the thinker becomes sublimated and refined until the manifold of existence is reduced to a single underlying and all-pervasive reality. And this underlying reality is frequently conceived of in terms of the psychic and rational in man. This rational principle in turn is personified very much like the personification of the *logos*-principle in Philo. This is most clearly shown in the teachings of certain sects of Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially in the teachings of the Amida sects of Japan. The conception of the personified *logos*-principle is succinctly summed up in the doctrine known as the

### **Three Bodies of Buddhism**

i.e., the three different meanings with which the phrase, the Body of Buddha, is used.

In the first place the Body of Buddha means the universe as such, or rather

the underlying reality of all things. This underlying reality the Buddhist calls the "real substance."

Real substance is the body of law which underlies the entire universe. This is the so-called spiritual essence which neither is born nor perishes. The apparent differences in the world are but the product of impure thought; outside the mind there are no real differences. Therefore the real essence of the universe is not to be expressed in words, nor can it be reduced to a fixed formula. It is incomprehensible and ultimately it is a Oneness in which there is neither change nor difference. It is indestructible, and because it is a Oneness it is called Real Substance. . . . Whatever is, is evolved from the One Body of Real Substance by the law of cause and effect, and therefore everything is substantially one and the same.

The Body of Buddha, then, in the first place means the underlying reality of all things. It is sometimes called the Law-Body of Buddha, i.e., the universe regarded as the expression of Law.

But in the second place the phrase, the Body of Buddha, means an Ideal Personality. That is, Buddha is not regarded as simply the Law of Things, but he is regarded as personal. Religion needs the concept of personality, say these Amida Buddhists. Through the working of the rational laws of the universe there appeared in the course of time a certain individual. This individual known as Hozo Biku through many lives of hardships and self-discipline finally attained Buddhahood, and he is now the Buddha Amitabha (Japanese Amida), the Personal God of Amida Buddhism.

Everything in the universe is evolved from the one body of Real Substance

spoken of above; "but in order to polish up existence into spiritual beings of absolute and perfect natures whose essence is mercy and wisdom a long process is needed." In this long process man appeared and among men in the course of time appeared the above-mentioned Hozo Biku who finally attained Buddhahood and who is now the god Amida. Notice, Amida is not a personal god, to begin with, for the absolute as such is not personal according to Buddhists, but only after a long process of the operation of the natural laws of the universe is personality evolved, and the personal gods of Buddhism are in the last analysis but the result of an evolution which had its beginnings in the impersonal. Thus the Law-Body of Buddha becomes the Personal Buddha which Amida Buddhists say is essential to religion, for the common man cannot grasp the concepts of philosophy, and needs reality reduced to the terms of personality.

Here then we have a clear case in which the *logos*-principle of the universe is made into a personal being. Sometimes the personifying tendency is carried a step farther. The distinctive attributes of this personal god Amida, viz., his mercy and wisdom, are themselves personified, and we get the goddess of mercy, *Kwannou*, and the god of wisdom, *Seishi*; and these two together with Amida, who is spoken of by some Buddhists as the Father, constitute the Buddhist Trinity, viz., *Amida*, *Kwannou*, and *Seishi*. These may be seen in many temples in Japan.

But the phrase the Body of Buddha is used in a third sense, viz., Buddha as revealed in the historic Buddhas of

which Gautama was but one in a long series. Whether the ultimate is regarded as mere impersonal Reason, or whether it is regarded as Personal, it manifests itself in historical personalities, especially in the great personalities of history; though all human beings are regarded as in some way reflecting the eternal. In this third conception of the Body of Buddha we have again the common Western conception of the eternal *Logos* manifesting itself in the *logoi* of individual beings.

Thus the oriental mind is not at all unprepared to understand the *logos*-doctrine of Christianity, or any other form of it. The most common form in the East is the conception of the *logos* as the rational principle in things. The *logos* as personal and as incarnate in the lives of Buddhas is held widely with a Pantheistic background, i.e., the impersonal *Logos* manifests itself in the *logoi* of individual beings. And finally the idea of the *logos* as a unique incarnation in a historical personality is not altogether absent, but it differs rather sharply from the Christian conception in that the clean-cut theistic background is wanting, and further in that the historical personality in which the *logos* is incarnate lacks the marks of reality. Hozo Biku, the incarnate *logos* of the Orient, has not a shred of historical reality about him. He is but the figment of men's minds, the subjective creation of those who were groping after God. If asked when this man Hozo Biku lived, we are told that he lived 10 *kalpas* ago. Now a *kalpa* is measured as follows: Fill a castle 10,000 miles in cube with mustard seeds. Take out one seed every three years and when the castle is

empty one *kalpa* has elapsed. Hozo Biku lived 10 *kalpas* ago. It is not strange that he does not seem very real. How tremendously real the Christian *Logos* of the Fourth Gospel seems when compared with this Buddhist figment of Amida! In fact, so *real* is Christ, the incarnate *Logos*, that many a Japanese Amidaist who is ready to accept the general theistic schema of Christianity balks when he comes to Jesus and his very definite demands upon a man's life.

#### **The Superiority of the *Logos*-Doctrine of Christianity**

And herein lies the great superiority of Christianity over Buddhism: not simply in its system of a theistic philosophy, but in its flesh-and-blood reality of the incarnate *Logos*, the Jesus of the New Testament. Jesus seems so magnificently *real* to one who has waded through the Buddhist subjective creations in the pursuit of a satisfying ideal. A doubting Thomas can see in him the nail prints of humanity and rejoice that he is so *real*. Christ is not merely a Savior-idea—*Hozo Biku* is that—but he is an objective reality back of the idea. Our modern psychologists who regard the god-idea and the Savior-idea as the important thing, irrespective of the ontological reference of the idea, have yet something to learn, the God-idea and the Savior-idea function only so long as there is a reality that corresponds to the idea. Buddhism has the idea of the incarnate *logos* in Hozo Biku, the savior of man, but this idea is as weak and unsatisfying as it is old, for there is no historical and objective reality back of it. The incarnate *logos* never existed as did the Christian *Logos*.